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Legacy of Violence

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LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

Sociologists continue to be vexed by the pathology of urban violence: Why is it so random, so fierce, so easily triggered? One answer may be found in our Southern past.

by Edward L. Ayers

A jostle, a slightly derogatory remark, or a potential weapon in the hands of an adversary means something to many poor blacks and whites it does not mean to the middle and upper classes, some criminologists argue. "A male is usually expected to defend the name and honor of his mother, the virtue of womanhood . . . and to accept no derogation about his race (even from a member of his own race), his age, or his masculinity," write the sociologists Marvin Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti. On the streets of our major cities, young men must guard against attacks on their status or demeaning words or glances. Fights over matters of pride seem to come easily and on occasion end in death.

This violence, while obviously fueled by the desperate poverty and bleak hopes of many young people, appears to have roots that stretch deep into America's past, into the world of the colonial era and the Old South and beyond there into the Britain of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A culture of violence grew luxuriantly in the hothouse atmosphere of the slave South. Slaveowners cultivated the most self-conscious version of this culture, but the values flourished at all levels of white society and even took hold among blacks in slavery. After the Civil War and emancipation, this culture began to die from the top down, fading among the gentry even as it remained strong among poorer whites and blacks. Fed by the weakness and perceived injustice of the law, the culture of violence grew in the cities and towns of the New South and followed Southerners of both races into their new homes in the twentieth-century North. Black and white Southerners from the 1830s or 1870s would understand the values of those who most often turn to violence today, North and South.

Southern violence became legendary early in the new nation's history. One visitor in the 1790s, appalled at the brutal fighting and eye gougings he found in Maryland and Virginia, was "credibly assured" that farther south, in the Carolinas and Georgia, "the people are still more depraved in this respect than in Virginia." An Englishman visiting those more southerly states several years later found the violence far bloodier and more widespread than he had expected: "The eye is not the only feature which suffers on these occasions. Like dogs and bears, they use their teeth and feet, with the most savage ferocity, upon each other."

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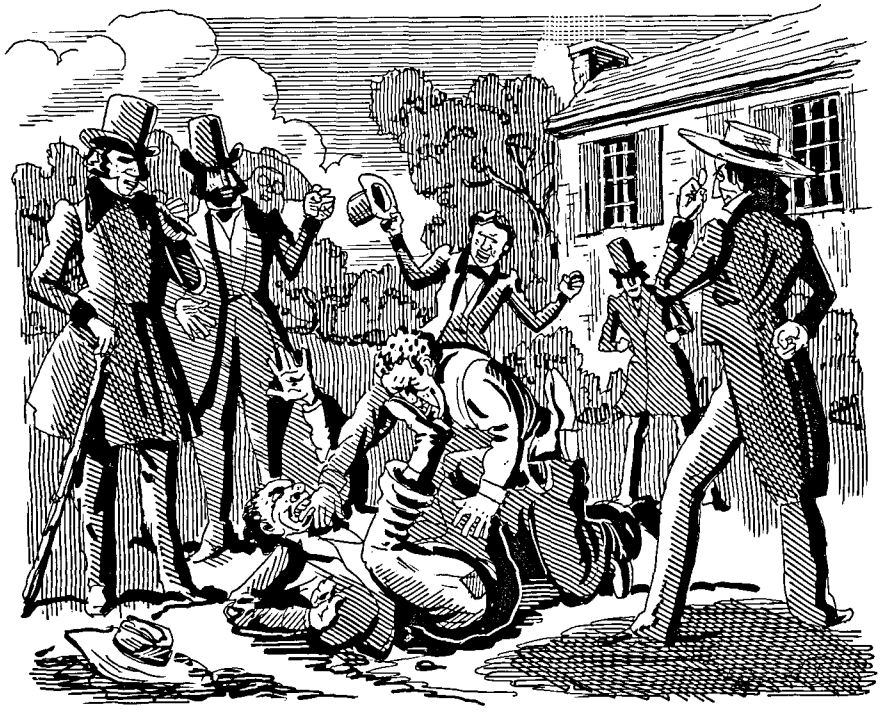

Another traveler, Elkanah Watson, witnessed the affairs of honor within the lower class. At a Virginia courthouse on election day in 1778, Watson watched "a fight between two very unwieldy, fat men, foaming and puffing like two furies, until one succeeded in twisting his forefinger in a side-lock of the other's hair, and was in the act of thrusting, by this purchase, his thumb into his adversary's eye, when he bawled out 'King's cruse,' equivalent, in technical language, to 'enough.'" Watson himself came "near being involved in a boxing-match" when he rebuffed "with little respect" an Irishman who wanted to swap horses. The immigrant from Ireland, his pride wounded, swore belligerently that the Englishman did not "trate him like a jintleman."

While backwoodsmen were brawling and disfiguring one another, planters and politicians solemnly faced each other on the dueling grounds. In 1826 a victorious duelist rushed to his fallen foe. "White, my dear fellow," he said quietly, "I am sorry for you." His bleeding opponent answered, "I do not blame you," and the two duelists clasped hands. The wounded man recovered, and the other was elected governor of Tennessee a few months later. A student wrote home that college life in Virginia presented certain dangers: "Challenges are continually passing; fights are had almost every day." Another student assured concerned faculty members that the bowie knife he carried would be used only "against a person who should insult him and refuse to give him

DRAWINGS BY ELLIOTT BANFIELD

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honorable satisfaction."

Every statistical index corroborates this eyewitness testimony. The South was far more violent than other parts of the United States from the earliest dates for which we have records. Even today a strong predictor of violence anywhere in the country is a heavy proportion of residents there who have a cultural tie to the South. Sociologists have long puzzled over the sources of the personal violence fistfights, shootings, stabbings—associated with the region. The complex answer has to begin with the Southern past.

Explanations for Southern violence have never been lacking. As early as the 1790s Thomas Jefferson observed that the unbridled authority wielded by slaveholders tended to breed impetuous behavior and shortness of temper, characteristics passed from one generation of masters to the next. Emily Burke, a New England schoolteacher who taught in Georgia in the 1840s, also located the origins of slaveholders' violence in the patterns of their upbringing: "At that tender age when the earth is in its most plastic state, no attempts are made to subdue his [the Southerner's] will or control the passions, and the nurse, whether good or bad, often fosters in her bosom a little Nero, who is taught that it is manly to strike his nurse in the face in a fit of anger." The wife of a Georgia planter told C. G. Parsons that "slaveholders' children, instead of being taught to govern their tempers, are encouraged to indulge their passions; and, thus educated, they become the slaves of passion." But while slaveholders might act with impetuosity, they accounted for only one strand of Southern violence. Nonslaveholding whites were, if anything, more violent than their wealthier neighbors. There has to be more to the phenomenon.

The frontier's corrosive effect on the power of the law has often been offered as another explanation of Southern violence. The frontier, this argument runs, breeds lawlessness, and the frontier was, in effect, built into the South in the form of plantations. Our national mythology assumes violence to be a natural outgrowth of the frontier; the explanation seems almost commonsensical to most Americans. But in other British colonies, such as Canada and Australia, frontier challenges similar to those of the United States did not breed notoriously high levels of violence among the settlers. Moreover, recent studies of the American West and Midwest challenge the stereotypes of rampant violence on these frontiers as well. The violence that did erupt in Western cattle towns and on the open range in the post–Civil War years may well have been Southern violence transplanted, especially by way of Texas. If earlier Southern frontier areas did suffer from violence—and from all accounts, they did—then we need to look beyond the mere locale to explore the character of the people who lived and died there. Bloodshed was the product of a culture Southern frontiersmen brought with them, not something they found waiting in the wilderness. The frontier of the South did witness violence, but primarily because the frontier exaggerated cultural traits already in existence.

And those cultural traits bring us back to the explanations Southerners themselves gave. They said they fought for honor's sake. The word *honor*, though, now puts many of us on our guard. It is an anachronism and conjures up images as archaic as jousting knights or, in our own history, of aristocratic planters facing each other at dawn with leveled pistols. From the perspective of modern culture, honor that must continually be fought over has no resonance or meaning, when values antithetical to it rule. Middle-class children today are taught to shrug off insult, to avoid violence if at all possible. Yet, just as Southerners claimed, many of them recognized the dictates of honor, a system of values within which you have exactly as much worth as others confer upon you.

A society that is so concerned with the perceptions of others is also likely to be subject to extreme patterns of behavior. Contemporaries who described Southerners as gracious and hospitable described men who adhered to honorable conduct, but so did those who described Southerners as touchy and belligerent. Honor led people in the South to pay particular attention to manners, to ritualized evidence of respect. When that respect was not forthcoming between men, no matter how small or imagined the slight, satisfaction would be demanded by the offended party. The most common way of obtaining it was through fighting a duel, an "affair of honor."

But this most famous expression of Southern honor was merely the visible tip of the iceberg. In fact, the duel came to the South long after the code of honor; it was not until the 1770s, when English and French army officers made it the fashion within the American army, that duels appeared with any frequency in the New World. For a few decades Northerners as well as Southerners fought on the field of honor, but by 1830 dueling and the South had become virtually synonymous. By the last antebellum decade the South stood alone in the Anglo-American world in its toleration of dueling.

Because the lower boundary of the "aristocratic" class was poorly drawn in the early nineteenth century, especially on the cotton frontier of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas, pretenders and outsiders sometimes persuaded themselves they could join the circle of the elect by fighting a duel. Timothy Flint, a Northerner who lived in the Mississippi Valley for many years, described how honor could become a commodity purchased with blood: "Many people without education and character, who were not gentlemen in the circles where they used to move, get accommodated here from the tailor with something of the externals of a gentleman, and at once set up in this newly assumed character. The shortest road to settle their pretensions is to fight a duel. Such are always ready for the combat." Fittingly enough, the published insult constituted the only American contribution to the ritual of the duel; the affronted party printed his "card" in a newspaper so that as many people as possible, including strangers, would know of his willingness to defend his honor—and know also that he possessed honor worthy of defense. An ambitious young man might make a name for himself just by challenging the right opponent in the fluid society of the Old Southwest.

Joseph G. Baldwin characterized with scorn and sarcasm the business of the courts of the cotton frontier of Alabama and Mississippi in the 1830s: "The major part of criminal cases, except misdemeanors, were for killing, or assaults with intent to kill. They were usually defended upon points of chivalry. The iron rules of British law were too tyrannical for free Americans, and too cold and unfeeling for the hot blood of the sunny south." A young lawyer from Alabama engaged in a revealing exchange with Alexis de Tocqueville, who asked: "Is it then true that the ways of the people of Alabama are as is said?"

"Yes. There is no one here but carries arms under his clothes. At the slightest quarrel, knife or pistol comes to hand. These things happen continually; it is a semi-barbarous state of society."

"But when a man is killed like that, is his assassin not punished?"

"He is always brought to trial, and always acquitted by the jury, unless there are greatly aggravating circumstances. . . . This violence has become accepted. Each juror feels that he might, on leaving the court, find himself in the same position as the accused, and he acquits."

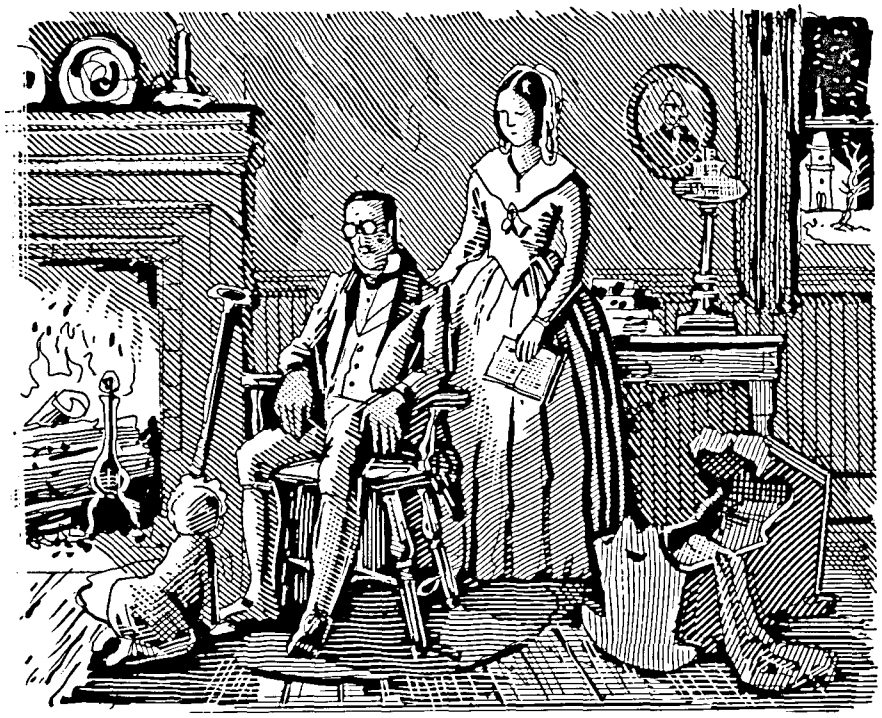
The young lawyer then admitted that he too had fought, and exhibited four deep scars on his head. Tocqueville, incredulous, asked, "'But you went to law?' . . . 'My God! No. I tried to give as good in return.'"

Honor did not reside only within the South's planter class. While some men faced each other under elaborate ritual on dueling grounds, many more combatants fought in obscure taverns and streets. The elite wrapped their violence in calm and detachment, directing one shot at their foes; the poor, on the other hand, gloried in boasting, improvisation, and inflicting as much damage as they could on their adversaries. Whatever the class of combatants, violence was not the product of mere impetuosity. It often began when men were stone sober, after a long period of frustration or series of conflicts. As one observer noted, "in by far the greater number of 'difficulties' it is known beforehand just what is about to happen, intimations of an impending struggle being whispered on the streets or in the country store, and everybody is listening for the reports of firearms that are to send one or more citizens into eternity." Southern violence possessed its own rules and unfolded on its own schedule.

White women played crucial roles in a society based on honor. A man who blustered his way into a duel might win honor among his male compatriots, but women would decide the full meaning of that honor. It was often women who defined the boundaries of who was and was not admitted to proper society, who determined whether a man's wife and family belonged. Many women refused to marry men who would not or could not defend their honor; no woman wanted to share in a dishonored name. And women's chastity and behavior played a crucial role in maintaining a family's honor, no matter how that honor had been won and no matter what class that family occupied.

Slavery constantly fed Southern honor among whites. It was slavery that systematically demeaned all black people, regardless of their character. It was slavery that inflated white people's sense of themselves, that allowed them to consider themselves benefactors, champions, and fathers

Northern culture, for its part, celebrated "dignity"; men were expected to remain deaf to the same insults that Southerners must resent.



to their slaves. It was slavery that allowed wealthy whites to consider themselves the heirs to the manners and pretensions of the English gentry. It was slavery that put violence and coercion behind moneymaking, that joined all white people in the domination of all black people. It was slavery that sealed off large parts of the South from the power of law, as slaveowners took the punishment of their slaves into their own hands.

Whites recognized no honor among slaves, but the slaves themselves refused to accept that. Without recourse to the power of the law, black men had no choice but to adjudicate conflicts among themselves. As a result, many of them, like many whites, turned to violence, display, boasting, and physical courage. Some whites professed to be unable to understand the causes of violence among black men, but the descriptions of that violence bear a striking resemblance to descriptions of white-on-white bloodshed. One white wrote: "It is utterly confounding for what trivial causes they will take the life of a fellow-slave. Sometimes it is simply a dispute about a game of cards or marbles; sometimes the being supplanted by a rival in the confidence of the master or overseer is the exciting cause; but much more frequently jealousy leads to the fatal deeds."

Not infrequently, too, slaves of both sexes, pushed to the limit, assaulted white people, including their masters and mistresses. Violence might erupt when a young son of a master used his authority too arbitrarily, when a detested overseer pushed too violently against the wrong person, when a usually lenient owner asserted authority in an arbitrary or cruel way, when a widowed owner remarried and the new partner tried to wield authority unrecognized by the slaves. Honor, in other words, seems to have been working under the surface of slavery. Black Southerners turned to honor not out of imitation of their white owners but in enraged response to the capriciousness, inhumanity, and despair of the slavery in which they lived.

Things were increasingly different above the Mason-Dixon line. By the mid-nineteenth century the North had generated the core of a culture antagonistic to honor. Northerners could only shake their heads in disbelief at Southern violence. "About certain silly abstractions that no practical business man ever allows to occupy his time or attention, they are eternally wrangling," one observer wrote in the 1850s, "and thus it is that rencounters, duels, homicides, and other demonstrations of personal violence, have become so popular in all slaveholding communities." Northern culture, for its part, celebrated "dignity"—the conviction that at birth white males possessed an intrinsic value at least theoretically equal. In a culture of dignity men were expected to remain deaf to the same insults that Southern men were expected to resent. "Call a man a liar in Mississippi," an old saying went, "and he will knock you down; in Kentucky, he will shoot you; in Indiana, he will say 'You are another.'" Dignity might be likened to an internal skeleton, a hard structure at the center of the self; honor, on the other hand, resembles a cumbersome and vulnerable suit of armor that, once pierced, leaves the self no protection and no alternative except to strike back in desperation.

The conflict between the rural cultures of North and South appeared in antebellum southern Illinois, where migrants from both regions settled. A Southerner who moved to Illinois recalled later that settlers from his native region scarcely saw notes, receipts, mortgages, or bonds until the Northerners arrived, and when the newcomers "sought to introduce their system of accounts, written notes, and obligations, they were looked upon with great suspicion and distrust, and their mode of doing business regarded as a great and unwarrantable innovation upon established usage." As one historian of the Midwest observes, "To the Southerner his own way of doing

business affirmed confidence and personal honor. To the Yankee it was a lack of proper system, a sinful inefficiency." The Yankee settlers built schools and libraries and founded colleges and newspapers; the upland Southerners just got along. In fact, the Southerners were known among the Yankees primarily for "intemperance, profanity, and *fisticuffs* on all public days."

Both honor and dignity had roots in Old World cultures but developed new strains in the bracing environment of the New World. Almost from the very beginning a subtle and reinforcing sifting process created regional cultures in North America. Once British settlers arrived in America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they drew upon different elements of their diverse and changing culture as increasingly divergent economies led the Northern and Southern colonies farther and farther apart.

As they grew in power and wealth, the Southern gentry of the colonial era sustained the values of a proud and domineering English aristocracy, a class whose power and authority the Southerners planned to replicate in the New World. Honor and its violence were a part of the culture they regarded as their own, as the only culture worthy of emulation.

The violence of honor came to the South along other routes as well. Lower-class English and Scots-Irish emigrants carried to America expectations and tendencies of their own, and these soon combined with the aristocratic ideals of honor to spark violence on every level of colonial Southern society. Philip Vickers Fithian, a tutor from New Jersey who kept a journal of his sojourn in Virginia in the 1770s, described the forms honor took among the common folk. One combatant might have offended another when he "has in a merry hour call'd him a *Lubber*, or a *thick-Skull*, or a *Buckskin*, or a *Scotchman*, or perhaps one has mislaid the other's hat, or knocked a peach out of his Hand, or offered him a dram without wiping the mouth of the Bottle; all these, & ten thousand more quite as trifling & ridiculous, are thought & accepted as just Causes of Immediate Quarrels, in which every diabolical Stratagem for Mastery is allowed and practised."

While Southern planters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries self-consciously modeled themselves on the English gentry, influential people in the North kept alive a sense of themselves directly and self-consciously opposed to worldly honor. Although the Puritans themselves faded away across the eighteenth century even in New England, aspects of their values endured to become known as the heart of the "Yankee" character. Where honor celebrated display, the ideal Puritan called for restraint. Where honor looked outward, the Puritans looked inward. Dignity also steadily gathered strength in the antebellum North because it was inextricably tied to the transformations of society and personality that accompanied the development and growth of a culture built around business. The ideal of the inherent value of the autonomous individual grew up simultaneously with the new ideals of character, of self-control, of discipline and delayed gratification that came to be the hallmark of the commercial middle class.

The North, however, was no more unanimous in its devotion to dignity than the South was in its devotion to honor. The various elements of dignity did not come together to form a coherent set of ideals until the 1830s, and even then dignity was constantly changing and growing. The spread of the gospel of dignity took on the dimensions of a crusade. Through educational and religious organizations, through publications and speaking tours, and through mass migration, New England colonized much of the North with the ideal.

Honor had its enemies in the South as well. From its earliest days evangelical Southern religion defined itself in opposition to the culture of honor. Not merely violence but the entire culture of display, ostentation, worldly hierarchy, sport, and amusement fell prey to its wrath.

Ministers urged women to help destroy the worldly and false system of values embodied in honor. "We would have every Christian young woman speak to these men of blood in the words of the patriarch, 'Instruments of cruelty are in their habitation. Oh! my soul come not thou into their secret,'" a Charleston pastor cried in the 1850s. "The mothers and daughters of Carolina are involved in a fearful responsibility on this subject. It is in their hands to stop this bloodshed, and in the name of God, I call upon them to do so."

Southern women embraced evangelicalism in ever-growing numbers and with ever-greater fervor throughout the nineteenth century. In a patriarchal society, piety gave women a system of belief that undermined the secular conception of females as mere bearers of children, household laborers, or mannequins of finery. Piety stressed woman's ability to discipline herself, to reject the world of fashion and prestige. The evangelical church gave women a new strength by offering them an autonomy found nowhere else, and in turn women constituted the church's greatest power. Honor increasingly became a male preserve.

Honor faced other enemies in the laws and courts. Honor and written laws against violence were incompatible, as the advice given to young Andrew Jackson by his mother reminded him: "The law affords no remedy that can satisfy the feelings of a true man." While honor reigned, a man who had taken the law into his own hands had little to fear from a jury. "Almost any thing made out a case of self-defense—a threat—a quarrel—an insult—going armed, as almost all the wild fellows did—shooting from behind a corner, or out of a store door, in front or from behind—it was all self-defense!" wrote Joseph G. Baldwin. And it usually really was self-defense, given

the inexorable way insult bred violence. Even Sir William Blackstone, from whom Southern lawyers worshipfully learned their craft, admitted that honor was "a point of nature so nice and delicate that its wrongs and injuries escape the notice of the common law, and yet are fit to be redressed somewhere." That "somewhere" was the Southern dueling ground, tavern, and street.

In part it was the South's deep loyalty to honor that helped spawn secession and the Civil War. All the signals from the North—the abolitionists, John Brown's raid, the response to the Fugitive Slave Law, Lincoln's election—were read not merely for their overt political content but for their affront to Southern honor. White Southerners in 1860 did not feel they could in good conscience accept the North's apparent disregard for Southern rights and opinion. The states of the upper South refused to secede until they saw that Lincoln was calling up troops for South Carolina; considering themselves invaded, they joined the states of the Deep South that had seceded months earlier. Honor may even have shaped Southern strategy in the ensuing war, encouraging frontal assaults and other daring strategies instead of less glorious defensive maneuvers.

After the South's defeat, one thing remained constant. "Self-respect, as the Southerners understand it, has always demanded much fighting," a Connecticut native serving in the Freedmen's Bureau explained to fellow Northerners. "A pugnacity which is not merely war paint, but is, so to speak, tattooed into the character, has resulted from this high sentiment of personal value." As in the colonial and antebellum periods, all classes seemed touched with violence: "It permeates all society; it has infected all individualities. The meekest man by nature, the man who at the North would no more fight than he would jump out of a second story window, may at the South resent an insult by a blow, or perhaps a stab or pistol shot."

Nor was the pervasive violence confined to the turbulent years of Reconstruction. As late as the 1890s the bloodshed was still a sign of Southern distinctiveness. "People who have never visited the Southern States but only read of these deeds of violence, are not infrequently inclined to smile when the principals are referred to as 'members of prominent families' or 'leading citizens,'" a Southern writer admitted. But in fact, "farmers, merchants, bankers, physicians, lawyers, even ministers of the gospel, often slay their fellow-man in private warfare, and often after a mock trial are set at liberty, not only with no serious detriment to their reputation, but in many instances with increased popularity."

A few mannered duels still occurred in the South after Reconstruction, but dueling was increasingly eclipsed by less formalized and more deadly violence. Perhaps the mass slaughter of the Civil War, the depersonalized and often senseless deaths in a losing cause, undermined Southerners' faith in ritualized violence. Perhaps, too, defeat forced members of the Southern elite to reconsider before ostentatiously engaging in a form of violence strictly reserved for an "aristocracy." Duelists who went upon the ground of battle "with all the hullaballoo and style imaginable," as one Georgia newspaper commented in 1889, "make themselves the laughing stock of the continent."

New avenues to respectability appeared in the South after the Civil War. Business now offered a legitimate and increasingly prestigious way to make a living, and there seemed little profit in a public ritual of bloodshed. One Southerner dreamed of a time when the values of business would purge the South of honor: in "the most highly civilized States . . . the foremost classes give little or no attention to enemies at all. . . . They do not care what any enemy says, and do not mind what he does, as long as he is not in debt to them. They keep up a disciplined police force to catch him and lock him up if he gets drunk, or threatens violence, or goes about calling names in the street." Another Southerner argued that "commerce has no social illusions" and that it would be commerce that would rid the region of "this historic, red-handed, deformed, and swaggering villain." As a Savannah newspaper put it, "In these modern times, character and honor depend upon a man's own life and conduct; not upon what another may say of him."

But even as business values, stronger churches, and a new mass culture worked in the New South to spread the values of dignity, Southern violence endured and escalated. Although dueling faded, a Southern professor warned, "the old spirit of so-called Chivalry has not declined with the 'Code': there is the same unwillingness—in a lessening degree—to go to the law; and in [the Southerner's] transition stage from the 'Code' to the courts we have fallen into the present lawless and cruel habit of street fighting." "The curse and shame of the South," lamented an 1882 article on the influence of homicide on Southern progress, "is the constant presence in the minds of all classes, from childhood up, of homicide as one of the probable contingencies of ordinary social life." Robert Penn Warren remembered that in Kentucky in the early twentieth century "there was a world of violence that I grew up in. You accepted violence as a component of life."

The postwar South saw a widespread concern with black violence as well as with white. Whites charged that dangerous black men who had been controlled under slavery were now on the loose, most of their anger focused on other black men. Young blacks, one white newspaper claimed, carried knives and firearms as a habit, "most especially when a ball, frolic or entertainment is on hand. And being ready to fight it is not astonishing that they use the pistol on the slightest provocation." In language that sounded much like descriptions of colonial

or antebellum white violence, Philip Bruce of Virginia held that arguments among black men could only be "settled by a resort to violence as desperate as it is impetuous; in the struggle no quarter is expected or allowed, and it is only terminated by the hasty retirement or the complete disablement of one of the parties."

Just as the antebellum Southern aristocracy believed itself to be above the law and thus adjudicated conflicts through honor, so did postwar black Southerners *know* themselves to be outside the law—whether they wanted to be or not. Blacks realized, after repeated painful experiences, that the law was what they called "white folks' law," its protections not extending to them. And black honor, which had grown in the vacuum of justice under slavery, acquired a force of its own that actively repelled the dictates of the written, abstract law. Manhood came to be equated with the extralegal defense of one's honor and unquestioning respect from peers. The contempt antebellum whites had felt for those who were so weak they had to go to the law for redress was amplified in the postbellum black community, for the law there represented not only an outside force but the force of the oppressor. Moreover, honor was often virtually all a poor black man owned, the only possession he could defend and identify with.

It might seem that the culture of honor and its violence should have soon withered and died in the inhospitable atmosphere of Northern cities, where so many generations of Southern migrants have moved. Dignity, after all, had supposedly flourished since the mid-nineteenth century within the schools, factories, and active governments of the North.

Indeed, historians have discovered that Northern cities, like industrialized societies in general, did experience declining rates of violence from the mid-nineteenth century well into this century. The institutions of industry and state did apparently act to encourage self-control, deferred gratification, and fear of detection and arrest, to reduce violence. Many migrants from the South, however, especially blacks, have remained insulated from such forces, stranded in desperate Northern inner cities, where unemployment, ineffective schooling, and dangerous neighborhoods not only allow Southern-style honor to survive but actually generate an honor of their own. Honor has found new breeding grounds in cities, once the most advanced outposts of dignity. "Whenever the authority of the law is questioned or ignored, the code of honor re-emerges to allocate the right to precedence and dictate the principles of conduct," an anthropologist has observed. Honor springs up "among aristocracies and criminal underworlds, school-boy and street-corner societies, open frontier and those closed communities where reigns 'The Honorable Society,' as the Mafia calls itself."

Lower-class whites and lower-class blacks perpetuated honor after most educated middle-class Southerners had turned away from honor and violence as archaic relics of a glorious but impractical Southern past. An acute sensitivity to insult and a propensity for violence—the manifestations of honor—came with each passing decade of the twentieth century to be increasingly identified with poor rural whites and poor urban blacks. Honor is fed every day in places where courts are not trusted, where the American dream seems off limits, and where poverty and frustration reign. There values hundreds of years old get a new lease on life. Honor may eventually fade away, but it has proved remarkably durable and dangerous in its first three hundred years in America. ★

Just as the antebellum aristocracy felt it was above the law, so did postwar black Southerners *know* they were outside the law, like it or not.

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